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# THE CONDOR

A Magazine of  
Western Ornithology

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## EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

Avifauna number 7 is in galley proof, and with fair luck should be off the press ready for distribution to Cooper Club members by August first. The subject of this paper is "The Birds of the Pacific Slope of Southern California." It consists of concise statements of seasonal and geographical distribution, nesting time and manner of nidification.

Mr. W. Leon Dawson is in the field in San Luis Obispo County, doubtless successful in securing photographic studies of certain Raptores necessary to the completeness of his "Birds of California."

The Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California is represented in field exploration this year as follows: Mr. H. S. Swarth and Mr. H. A. Carr are at work in Owens Valley, with base stations at Lone Pine, Keeler and Independence, successively. Mr. W. P. Taylor and Mr. F. H. Holden (to be succeeded later by Mr. T. I. Storer) are tracing out the distribution of certain rodents in the Sacramento Valley. Mr. J. Grinnell, in company with Mr. J. S. Hunter, an agent of the State Fish and Game Commission, is investigating the status of game animals in the mountainous region of Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Kern counties. All this season's work is thus within the State of California.

## COMMUNICATION

EDITOR OF THE CONDOR:

Mr. H. S. Swarth in his review of my

"Monograph of the Broad-winged Hawk" feels that a few points, which he cites, could have been made more clear and explicit. In justice to my work, I would state that the evidence presented under the head of "Local Distribution" gave me no choice other than the restriction of the summer range of *Buteo platypterus platypterus* "south to Florida and Central Texas." Though Zeledon briefly states that it "breeds" in Costa Rica, and I have faithfully transcribed the comparative description and position of the nest in Central America according to Salvin and Godman, I can find no specific record of its breeding, or the capture of the bird in the breeding season, south of the line given.

Sometime before I had decided to insert a name for the small, dark Cuban bird, with the heavily banded thighs and wing lining, the entire manuscript was ready for publication, too late to upset the entire plan of the work. Also, I feel that I, a humble amateur, was not sufficiently impressed with the importance of a mere form. The Bayote specimen described on pp. 147-148, is of course the type of *Buteo platypterus cubanensis*.

Yours truly,

FRANK L. BURNS.

## PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

THE HOME-LIFE | OF | THE OSPREY | Photographed and described | by | CLINTON G. ABBOTT, B. A. | Associate of the American Ornithologists' Union | with some photographs by Howard H. Cleaves, Associate of | the American Ornithologists' Union. | With thirty-two Mounted Plates | London | Witherby & Co., 326 High Holborn W. C. | MCMXI. Large 8vo, cloth, pp. 1-54, pls. 1-32. In America to be bought for \$2 at Bretano's, 229 Fifth Ave., New York City.

This treatment of a single bird species is, in the recollection and judgment of the reviewer, among the most faithful, as well as comprehensive, that has ever appeared. The text is admirably composed, from both a literary standpoint and that of ornithological veracity. An element of conciseness is apparent which accounts for a compass of fifty-four pages, where a modern "nature-writer" might have made two hundred.

No less fascinating than the text are the first-quality illustrations, selected each to show some particular feature of behavior of the birds, or construction of their nests. These photographs demonstrate a very close acquaintance on the part of the author with the subject of his essay. If proof were needed, this is alone sufficient to give the reader confidence in all the details of the author's narration of his experiences with the Osprey.

It might be urged that the Osprey, in the haunts where Mr. Abbott's studies were carried on, was an easy subject, because the

birds had for generations been accustomed to man. Such a bird, however, is of none the less interest, because available close to a great metropolis. In fact this contingency adds general interest. The Osprey has been treated before in many places, both biographically and photographically, but, in spite of its accessibility, always in a desultory fashion. It seems strange that expeditions are continually being undertaken to remote regions for the purpose of making life studies of particular birds seldom known even by name to the people at large. But then, in these cases, there are the elements of travel and adventure, which give that thrill which seems usually necessary to supply the impetus to both the contributors of expenses and the active agent in the enterprise.

Mr. Abbott has established a most commendable precedent, both in his selection of a close-at-hand subject for intensive ornithological study, and in the success with which he has observed facts and presented them in concise and literarily correct form.—J. GRINNELL.

THE BIRDS OF NORTH AND MIDDLE AMERICA: [etc.] by ROBERT RIDGWAY, [etc.] Part V. | Family Petroptochidae—The Tapaculos. | Family Formicariidae—The Antbirds. | Family Furnariidae—The Ovenbirds. | Family Dendrocolaptidae—The Woodhewers. | Family Trochilidae—The Hummingbirds | Family Micropodidae—The Swifts. | Family Trogonidae—the Trogons. | [etc.]. =Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus. No. 50, Part V, pp. i-xxiii, 1-859, pls. i-xxxiii; "issued November 29, 1911."

Part V of Ridgway's great work shows a consistent maintenance of the very high standard set in Part I, which appeared ten years ago. The enormous value of the work as a whole to systematic and faunistic ornithologists is becoming increasingly apparent as a larger proportion of the undertaking yields to completion. We are informed in the preface of the fifth part that the number of species and sub-species described in the five volumes is 2038, and that about 1200 forms remain to be treated in the subsequent parts of the work.

The scope of the present installment is indicated in the title, quoted in its essential details above. The great bulk of the species belong to Mexico and Central America. Only the hummingbirds and swifts include regular representatives north of the Mexican line. Among these we note, of nomenclatural interest, that the limits of the genus *Nephocetes* are extended to include our Black Swift,

which becomes accordingly *Nephocetes niger borealis*.

In the statements of ranges of certain of our hummingbirds, notably the Allen and Rufous, we regret to see lack of accord with the facts as now recognized. These inaccuracies are the result of accepting many really erroneous records of occurrence at face value. A lamentable thing, borne in upon us strongly of late, is the confusion that has evidently arisen even among experienced field ornithologists in the identification of breeding hummingbirds. Discrimination has not been carefully drawn between species actually nesting, and species which merely appear in transit through a region even though the latter may occur at a season when other species have eggs or small young. The breeding of the Rufous Hummingbird on the Santa Catalina Mountains, Arizona, and in Santa Clara County, California, are extreme instances of unlikelihood. That the Allen Hummingbird is "resident" throughout the greater part of its range is very much to be doubted.

We call attention to this misfortune here, not in criticism of Mr. Ridgway, who in his function of compiler cannot be expected to analyse at all critically the vast numbers of records to be considered and incorporated, but to point out wherein we must revise our conclusions in the light of more careful field work. Even the last (1910) edition of the A. O. U. *Check-List* is pretty shaky in its "ranges" of hummingbirds.

But let us again refer to Ridgway's *Birds* in the more happy vein, which it most emphatically deserves. The detailed descriptions, drawn up by an experienced hand, are alone of inestimable value, especially as regards the species of tropical America. A thing we have observed is the tendency, and oftentimes expediency, of adopting well worded and accurate descriptions when once drawn up, in subsequent literature. Mr. Ridgway has already provided characterizations which are recognizable as his, copied far and wide in popular and semi-scientific books on North American birds. In the further development of ornithology of the now lesser known parts of the American continent, Ridgway's skilled treatment will always be the basis.—J. GRINNELL.

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF BIRD LIFE By RICHARD H. SULLIVAN. [=Agricultural Education, Kansas State Agricultural College, vol. 3, no. 7, pp. 1-47, 30 figs. in text.]

At the present time there is considerable discussion as to the value of the great flood of bulletins that are yearly poured out from